READING RACISM: THE ASSUMPTION OF AUTHORIAL INTENTIONS IN STEPHEN CRANE'S "THE MONSTER"

José Angel GARCÍA LANDA
Universidad de Zaragoza

There is a core of meaning in a text which is linked both to the issues central to the historical circumstances of its writing and to those of its reading at one given moment. Readers may adapt the text to their own interests to a certain point, but they cannot ignore its intended meaning without producing a deviant reading, one that stresses certain elements in the work while it ignores others which are equally central and perceptible to other contemporary readers. I will focus on the interpretation of the authorial intention[1] in Stephen Crane's story "The Monster," and more specifically on the role of racial difference. One of the heroes of the story, Henry Johnson, "the monster," is a black man. The question is, to what extent is this fact relevant to the work? What difference would it make if Henry were white? Up to 1950, the answer seems to be: none. Most critics make nothing of Henry's race; they simply mention in their description of the story that Henry is black. Of course, the significant thing is that they do mention it.But les ut start *ab ovo*.

The first reader of a work is the author himself. Stephen Crane's pride in his work is the first critical appraisal of "The Monster." Once, Crane went as far as to say that "The Monster" was the best thing he had ever written (Harriman 1900). The next readers usually are the author's friends who read the unpublished manuscript or listen to the author reading it aloud, as Crane did in the presence of Harold Frederic and Sanford Bennett[2]. Here "The Monster" met its

first critics. Frederic advised him to discard the manuscript, because of its disgusting subject matter. Crane defended his work passionately, with the polite assentment of Bennett; Crane held that fear was an irrelevant response to a story "with some sense in it" (Beer 1923: 328-330). There is no direct evidence that Crane saw the question of race as an important issue in his work.

The editors follow, and they are possibly the most influential readers: "When Paul Reynolds offered it to T*he Century* it was refused with speed, an editor explaining to the puzzled agent: 'We couldn't publish that thing with half the expectant mothers in America on our subscription list.'"[3] M. Solomon (1956b: 39) interprets this rejection as a sign that "The Monster" was felt to voice up a complaint against the situation of American blacks; he notes that The Century was one of the publications most inclined to the diffusion of racially derogatory stereotypes. However, none of the early critics seems to interpret the story in this militant sense.

Finally the story was published in a single issue of *Harper's Magazine*.[4] From the first review on we can see that "The Monster" was not read in Crane's time merely as a horror story[5], at least not by all readers. One reviewer (*Book Buyer* 1900) does see "The Monster" as a potentially fine horror story spoiled by a realistic treatment; and Hughes praises the vividness of "The Monster" and sees in it a realistic incursion into the horrible: "its sickening qualities are mitigated by the indirectness of their suggestion, its trivialities are redeemed by the psychological dignity of the physician's problem" (1900: 252). Another reviewer (*Critic* 1900) sees "social odium" against the doctor as the main subject; a fourth one (*Academy* 1901) sees in "The Monster" "an amazing story" and a worthwhile one, with deeper interest than "The Blue Hotel" , which he praises for its "knowledge of human nature." A further anonymous reviewer considers the story somewhat unreal, "a study in abstract emotions" (*Athenaeum* 1901: 263). Its very first reviewer, Robert Bridges (1898) sees in it a psychological story, with the psychology coming of dramatization and montage rather than of rendering of thoughts. "The comedy of the Dutch barber shop and of the negro dandy's call upon his sweetheart is irresistible" for Bridges. No other reader seems to have found these scenes funny enough to call attention to them; perhaps they are not considered funny at all. According to Bridges, "There is also unexpected elevation in the motive of the story . . . . The quiet heroism of the Doctor is admirably indicated. He is the central figure of the drama, and yet he says least and seldom appears." Of course it is mo*ral* heroism that Bridges is referring to. Most later readers seem to agree with him and see in Trescott's moral conflict the center of the drama. A connection with Hawthorne's story "The Minister's Black Veil" seems to be hovering about in Bridges's mind, when

he praises Crane's "admirable Hawthornesque plan" of suggesting fear by showing its effects and hiding the object of horror itself under a veil.

Crane's style may be Hawthornesque, but Hawthorne's son Julian did not appreciate it. His review is often quoted as an indictment of "The Monster": "I call this an outrage on art and humanity," etc.,[6] and it is indeed a rather superficial reading of the story. But the outrage is not the situation, or Crane's condemnation of the town's veneer of morals and manners (which Hawthorne finds only facile); the outrage is that Crane provides no *deus ex machina* : "And if you believe it, Crane leaves the matter in that condition, without the faintest pretense of doing anything whatever to relieve it!." That is, Hawthorne is complaining that the subject of the story, a moral dilemma, is inadequately dealt with, or shirked.

None of these early readers seems to have seen the question of race as significant: at most, they are in tune with (what I take to be) the authorial attitude and they accept the comic role assigned to the blacks. The more scholarly estimates that follow around 1920 see the story mainly as social critique. Curiously enough, they do not stress Trescott's role as a moral hero. Edith Wyatt sees in the story "a chronicle of the cruelty of the people" in the town, a moral condemnation of "mob-meanness" (1915: 149); Vincent Starrett also places the theme of social morality foremost: "the ignorance, prejudice and cruelty of an entire community are sharply focussed. The realism is painful: one blushes for mankind" (1920: 313). For Carl Van Doren the effect of "The Monster" is to"expose the stupidity of public opinion in a cramped province" (1924: 330); for Thomas Beer, "'The Monster' is a study of popular stupidity" (1941: 329). Wilson Follett sees in it "a piece of social irony, a miniature anticipation of *Main Street* " (1926: x).

The story is apparently forgotten for twenty years: it has been twice rediscovered, after the world wars (Kahn 1963: 35). From the fifties on, the story is seen (together with *Maggie*) as Crane's attempt at portraying a whole community, with a variety of distinct groups[7]. The interpretation of the story as social criticism is of course maintained and developed[8], but we may see the influence of the New Critics in the analysis of Crane's treatment of the subject. An increasing attention is devoted to questions of structure, language and imagery, and there is a variety of new approaches to the story even if the interpretive core is still Crane's moral attitude[9]. But for most critics the emphasis is on Trescott's heroism and his role as a protagonist, rather than on the meanness of Whilomville. The condemnation of moral meanness remains, but most critics would say that the story's main subject is something like "the nature and fate of heroism" (Cady 1980: 158). Many readers, even contemporary readers, do not mention racism as an issue in "The Monster." But from the fifties on, this aspect

of the story becomes more and more prominent. In the age of the Civil Rights movement the racial attitude of the story is emphasized by Marxist critics (M. Solomon, O. V. Vasil'evskaia) as well as by black critics (Ralph Ellison, Donald Gibson).

Maxwell Geismar[10] characterizes Crane's attitude towards blacks as one of condescending sympathy; Crane considered them childlike beings. John Berryman, on the other hand, sees in black men "the object of Crane's own (fantasied) horror, envy, fascination and inquiry" (1950: 307). At twelve, Crane had seen a white girl stabbed by her black lover (Berryman 1950: 306); Berryman shows how in other stories[11] Crane used black men "as a symbol—a natural one—for darkness, sex and sin" (!?! 306). He sees an association of blacks with sex in the title of *The Black Riders* and in the name of a "sinner" in *Active Service* , Nora Black. These are helpful hints to interpret the unconscious authorial attitude towards the blacks in "The Monster," although this is evidently not in the least the image of black men that we get in the surface of this tale; nor does Berryman refer to "The Monster" in this respect[12].

The first reading which stresses the significance of the racial element in "The Monster" is M. Solomon's. This Marxist critic is not satisfied with the interpretation of "The Monster" as a social satire against bourgeois provincialism. "Nor can we merely discuss it in terms of the ethic of loyalty .... Central to 'The Monster' is its appeal for brotherhood between all races" (M. Solomon 1956b: 39). Although M. Solomon points out some limitations of Crane's racial consciousness, his conclusion is that "we cannot fail to admire this young writer who was intuitively far in advance of his contemporaries" (1956b: 40).

Ralph Ellison also mentions the importance of the racial element in "The Monster"; he seems to read the divided attitudes of the town on the subject of Henry Johnson as symbolically suggestive of the attitudes towards black Americans after the Civil War, but he is ready to recognize "that the issues go much deeper than the question of race" (1960: 75). He locates Crane (presumably with respect to the literary handling of racism) somewhere between Mark Twain and Faulkner.

Eric Solomon sees Crane's handling of the black society in Watermelon Alley as a parody and analogy of white society (much as the children in the Whilomville Stories reflect the attitudes of the adults). He remarks that we see the fire scene in chapter VII through Henry Johnson's consciousness. E. Solomon praises the narrator's commentary that the desperate Johnson was submitting to the fire "because of his fathers, bending his mind in a most perfect slavery to the conflagration" (TM 28) as containing "a measure of psychological (and political) insight" (1966: 187). M. Solomon had also quoted the passage for its psychological credibility (1956b: 40). However, E. Solomon complains

against the naturalistic image of Johnson being reduced to a bellowing animal or to a Negro in the swamp (1966: 188; TM 30)[13]. He sees an element of racism (condemned by Crane) in the townspeople's attitude towards the 'resurrected' Johnson: "The only good saint is a dead saint; the same holds true for a Negro" (1966: 192). E. Solomon sees Crane's handling of the town's reactions to Johnson as a social panorama which moves from the lower to the higher social classes in both black and white societies. Alek Williams, who as a rural black man is at the bottom of the social scale, is a "ridiculous Uncle Tom figure."[14] But his situation becomes pathetic when the judge dismisses as irrelevant his claims to having a normal social life. E. Solomon sees here an element of paternalism in Trescott's attitude toward Alek, and an ironic prefiguration of Trescott's own isolation at the end of the story. Ostracization, E. Solomon implies, is not considered a serious problem if the victim is a black man, but becomes a tragedy if the victim is a respectable white doctor (1966: 193-194). However, we may well wonder if this is not an instance of reading in. The parallel between Williams and Trescott is no doubt a part of Crane's intentions. But it is difficult to deny that they are set to a very different key. Williams's plight is seen ironically throughout; Trescott's is not. There is some difficulty in pinning down the authorial attitude here because there is another issue which, together with the question of race, overdetermines our reaction: Trescott's attitude toward Henry Johnson is more adequate than Williams', and we tend, like Crane, to lump Williams together with the townspeople into the bag of provincial ignoramuses. Is it only people with a heroic moral stance who deserve our sympathy, or is it white men? Are blacks intrinsically comic?

Few critics have followed M. Solomon in stressing Crane's attitude to racism as the main theme of the story. Vasil'evskaia's reading seems to derive directly from Solomon's. According to her, "The story 'The Monster' is a sincere and profound condemnation of racism"; "Crane steps out to defend the blacks and boldly speaks his sympathy."[15] Vasil'evskaia's reading of "The Monster" as a *roman à thèse* about a good black persecuted by a town of racist hypocrites raises obvious problems. However, there may be something in her claim that the horror and hate which Johnson inspires is the expression of "that gregarious racist instinct which has long been so assiduously inculcated on the American citizen" (1967: 218). Gibson makes a similar point: Henry incarnates the community's deepest fears, because he seems to them "a monster created by his condition as a Negro in America" (1968: 138). There is a suggestion of this idea, too, in John Cooley, when he observes that Henry's facelessness brings into focus "that virtual facelessness he quietly tolerated in the white community before the fire" (1975: 12)[16]. Gibson sees a racial element in the community's insistence on driving Henry out; it is the desire to feel no

responsibility for him and for blacks as a whole: only Trescott recognizes his responsibility. However, Gibson does not wish to stress the question of race overmuch: "despite the racial theme, which may strike us as especially significant today, 'The Monster' is finally a story about human responsibility" (1968: 138).

Malcolm Foster's reading differs from these (and from all others) in that he takes Crane's condemnation of racism and hypocrisy to extend to Trescott and the whole of white America, not just the petty bourgeois mentality. "The Monster" is "an allegory of the black man in America in the nineteenth century, and an angry condemnation of white America—Whilomville—including such weak-willed and compromising meliorists such as Trescott" (1976: 87). Henry's isolation after his accident is the real evil, and is an allegory of the ambiguous status of blacks after 1866: neither slaves nor treated as humans (1976: 88). However, there is a survivor in Foster's sweeping condemnation: the author.

I find it difficult to read The Monster as a straightforward instance of civil rights literature. M. Solomon's interpretation of the story is problematic: his view of it as a plea for racial fraternity is not easily reconciled with his acknowledgement that elsewhere in his life or his writings Crane does not show any special concern for the oppression of the blacks, and he is not known to have had any black person among his friends or acquaintances. "In Crane's newspaper account of 'The Wreck of the Commodore' he shows a callous lack of regard for the lives of the Negro seamen who perished. There are only single, stereotyped references to Negroes in *The Red Badge* , *Maggie* and *The Third Violet*, and none of consequence in *Active Service* , *George's Mother* or any of the major short stories" (M. Solomon 1956b: 40). Lawrence Gross, too, observes that generally speaking Crane noted without comment the servile position of blacks[17], but he makes the best of it: Crane was "free enough of the Jim Crow attitude which dominated the Nineties to make a black his hero for a purpose" (1975: 108). He also notes in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" the presence of a sophisticated Negro waiter who bullies the naive Jack Potter without his noticing. Gross assumes that here and in "The Monster" blacks are elevated "for the purpose of comparison" (?)[18]. In short, Gross holds that Crane, while not a racist, is not in the least concerned with political writing, with a literature of engagement in favour of the blacks. M. Solomon takes Crane's destruction of his supposedly racist story "Vashti in the Dark" to be significant of his attitude towards the problem (1956b: 40). Cooley considers that Crane usually draws on what he calls the "savage" mode in which white literature often presents blacks. The assumption behind this mode is that "blacks are innately savage people" (1982: 39). Anyway, he considers Henry Johnson to be "a far cry from the blatantly racist portraits of writers such as Thomas Dixon and Charles Carroll" (1982: 39).

Cooley sees in "The Monster" the contrast between the savagery of the "civilized" whites and the unsavage and unmonsterlike reality. It is Crane's most critical portrait of society. He sees a suggestion of racism in the town's reaction to the news of Henry's "death": if the townspeople accept him as a hero it is not only because he is dead, (as other critics have argued) but because whites like the idea of blacks willingly sacrificing themselves for them (1975: 12). He assumes, however, that Crane's authorial attitude is free from this prejudice; this seems more questionable to me.

Let us organize a critical forum on some issues relevant to racial attitude. The critics I do not mention do not challenge the adequacy of the "unmarked," or literally stated, authorial attitude. I comment mainly on the deviant critics.

- The narrator approves of Jimmie and Henry being pals. This fact has not been debated, and its adequacy has rarely been contested. M. Solomon describes chapter II as an "idyll" with "more than one touch of condescension" (1956b: 39); specifically, he objects to Crane's comment that "[i]n regard to almost everything in life they seemed to have minds exactly alike" (TM 6). Vasil'evskaia (1967: 214) does not object to this scene, nor does Cooley; he points out similarities between chapter II of "The Monster" and works such as Uncle Tom's Cabin and Huckleberry Finn, where white children also retire from white society to find companionship in a black character.
- Henry's loyalty to the Trescotts seems to be approved of by the author, and this is not contested by the critics. M. Solomon stresses that Henry's devotion to Jimmie is not "in the servile, stereotyped manner which the Plantation Tradition novelists insist upon" (1956b: 40). Vasil'evskaia (1967: 214) also notes it without reproach.
- The fact that the blacks reject Henry prevents us from seeing in him a simple allegory of black people in general. It is significant that Vasil'evskaia completely ignores the Alek Williams scenes, and sees in the "Miss Fa'gut" scene only a particular instance of a girl's "spiritual poverty" (1967: 219). Cooley is angered by this scene, and he does not consider that it is effective at all: "Instead of suffering from shock we see that Henry has been reduced by Crane to something approaching the comic stereotype of Sambo" (1975: 13). None of these readings is adequate. Vasil'evskaia ignores that the scene not only tells us about Bella's limitations, but also about Henry's own. Cooley seems to read this scene as if it were Henry's first visit in chapter III, where he is indeed presented as Sambo (though Cooley chooses not to see this). In the meantime, he has lost his face, and this makes the previous scene acquire a new significance. Cooley himself has noted that Henry's injury is the injury of black Americans as a whole. There is something in this scene of the collective, unconscious pain of a people who have no other choice than to accept integration in the society which

destroyed their identity. The first scene was comic from Crane's point of view: this one is pathetically absurd. Of course Bella and her mother are terrified because of Henry's appearance; but at another level of interpretation they are terrified because they are now facing their inescapable condition as American blacks: Henry's second visit brings out the hidden pathos of the first. This is a possible reading in 1989. Yet I think that Crane's overall handling of black stereotypes prevents us from seeing this as an intended effect. As in many other cases, here the work is greater than the author.

• Crane's attitude to Henry's dandyism has been more debated. M. Solomon sees here one of the weak points of "The Monster" . He compares Henry's portrait to the racial caricatures of other Crane stories like "The Knife": "Crane unwittingly helped perpetuate" the literary stereotypes of blacks (1956b: 39). Foster agrees: "Crane initially makes Johnson fit two stereotypes: the benign and almost childlike Nigger Jim or Uncle Remus, and the cake-walking minstrel-show comic dandy" (1976: 88). Moreover, these stereotypes are juxtaposed rather than integrated: Henry sheds his servant's garments and actually becomes a "different" person when he dresses as a dandy.

The narrator's attitude is only one of "friendly irony" for Vasil'evskaia, who systematically ignores M. Solomon's reservations on the adequacy of Crane's racial attitudes. For her narrator, Henry may be vain, but he is a hero (1967: 214-215); her Crane is so at home with blacks that he can afford not to idealize them, and have a little non-racist laugh now and then. But we can hardly ignore the fact that in writing about a black character Crane has chosen to present him from the start as falling squarely in the facile cliché which was sure to be recognized and positively responded to by his (white) readers[19]. Cooley deplores this fact but only in the most evident instances: "It is regrettable that Crane mixes these racial generalizations ('the elasticity of his race') with a portrait which, in its totality, skirts the easy generalizations of black character to create the individualized portrait we see of Henry before he is maimed in the fire" (1975: 10). Surprisingly enough, Cooley does not find that such scenes as the Jimmie-Henry *tête-à-tête* in chapter II or Henry's dressing up and cake-walking in chapter III are instances of such racial generalizations. According to Cooley, Crane's literary dealing with racism presents "the savagism of a white society and, in ironic contrast, the more enlightened perspective of a narrative voice, or the first-hand experience of a black character" (1982: 38). He quotes Crane's narrator on the companionship between Henry and Jimmie: "In regard to almost everything in life they seemed to have minds precisely alike" (TM 6). "The insertion of 'seemed,'" Cooley argues, "saves the description from racist assumptions" (1982: 40). We may concede this, but still it was a close call; there is no observer at hand, other than the narrator, to justify the workings of this verb.

Cooley takes Crane's satire to fall on the whites who laugh at him, while Henry good-humouredly is already appearing to the reader as being morally superior (1975: 11). But Henry Johnson does get a good share of the authorial irony, to the extent that he is characterized as a comic figure, the black who tries to dress as a white man but only succeeds in being ridiculous. There follows the scene of Henry and the Farraguts going through the motions of a highbred visit; this is of course an indirect satire of the sham manners of Whilomville, but only through a direct satire of black people trying to act like whites. For instance, the attitudes in the following passage are expected to be contemplated ironically: "The change was somewhere far in the interior of Henry. But there was no cake-walk hyperbole in it. He was simply a quiet, well-bred gentleman of position, wealth, and other necesary achievements out for an evening stroll, and he had never washed a wagon in his life" (TM 10). Cooley reads this passage as follows: "To his author, Henry is not a comic or ludicrous figure. Forced by society to an inferior position, he can at best imitate white society and pretend he is a gentleman" (Cooley 1982: 40); Johnson is like an actor who shifts roles to make the best of his situation in every moment. That is, Cooley does not find that this passage is making fun of Johnson's false idea of what he can pass for. Johnson is only acting as a gentleman of position and wealth without acknowledging to himself that it will necessarily show, because blacks are not gentlemen of position and wealth; and there is a "cake-walk hyperbole" in Johnson's manners which soon has all the town gaping at him:

> "Ain't he smooth?"
> "Why, you've got that cake right in your pocket, Henry!"
> "Throw out your chest a little more!"
> Henry was not ruffled in any way by these quiet admonitions and compliments. In reply he laughed a supremely good-natured, chuckling laugh, which nevertheless expressed and underground complacency of superior metal. (TM 12)

Cooley finds that the authorial attitude in this passage does not become clear until Crane satirizes the citizens later on (1982: 41). But their condemnation does not necessarily imply a retrospective plea for Johnson. Morace (1981: 68) apparently sees in this scene only an instance of Crane's objectivity: his satire falls on blacks and whites alike. He seems to read in the narrator's attitude toward Henry a note of admiration beneath the mockery, reflected on the comment on Henry's "superior metal." But in the context Crane is using Henry's own idea of himself, and presenting it to the reader's olympian irony. I take the passage to be completely ironic, and even doubly ironic. The citizens address Henry ironically, but in turn they reveal themselves to the reader as oppressively

provincial. The first phrase by the narrator is also ironic in the use of "quiet admonitions and compliments" to describe the crowd's jeering at Henry. But Henry is not ruffled for two reasons: first, because of his good nature (not unrelated to his position of inferiority); second, because he interprets the violently mocking reactions of the white men as a sign that he is sufficiently convincing as a gentleman of position to disturb their sense of propriety and excite their reaction. That is why he can laugh with a secret feeling of superiority. The words of the white men are complimentary for Johnson, though not in the way in which they believe he takes them to be. But this secret contentment of Johnson's is at the same time the prey of the narrator's irony: for the narrator, Henry is being ridiculous not (only) because he is the standard comic figure the citizens recognize, but because of his snobbery and his self-conscious ignorance of his false position. However, we may now feel that the narrator's irony is too close to the crowd's; people like Henry have had to ignore their false positions constantly in order to make them true. In a situation of inequality the notion of an "impartial satire" is a con*tradictio in adjecto* . In short, Crane's attack on snobbery is misplaced insofar as he picks on the blacks. Or, Crane's character knew better than his author.

It seems clear to me that Crane saw in the unacknowledged self-consciousness of the blacks in chapter III a rich matter for comedy. Cooley deplores this fact but he insists that Henry Johnson is an exception at least before he is "debased." Despite his good intentions, Crane gives proof of a sadly limited racial consciousness (Cooley 1975: 14). I agree; indeed, I would argue that Johnson is not at all that exceptional: he is a thoroughly formulaic type, who becomes a hero because the story needs one. Crane is interested above all in Trescott's moral dilemma, and his decision to cast a black rather than a white servant is subordinated to the theme of Trescott's heroism. A black was more adequate than a white due to a complex of reasons, all of them springing from the servile position of American blacks. The tragedy requires that Johnson should be to some extent an appendage of Trescott: his fate must hang on Trescott's will. A slave makes the issues neater than a servant would. The household slave is often presented as a part of the family; he is linked to it by an admiring fidelity. Crane held that after the war things were " 'bout the same" for black servants[20]. Because of his subhuman status the black slave is forced into the role of a grown child. Henry must be both an adult and Jimmie's pal, in order to make the more poignant the latter's attitude towards him in chapter XX. This kind of emotional fidelity suits Crane best for the purposes of his story, as a parallel to Trescott's own feeling of personal obligation. But his scheme does not aim at making a statement on the matter of racism. Rather, he makes it unconsciously, because of the explosive nature of the material he was dealing

with. Crane could only handle a black character as a type, but he needed a hero, and presto, Henry Johnson runs to the rescue in his red trousers and straw hat. The narrator's ironic view of Henry stops at the moment when he rushes into the house to save Jimmie (Cooley 1975: 11).

• Henry's role as a hero is an ambiguous one. For Cazemajou, Crane has, "by the very choice of his protagonist, indicated that true heroism is not the privilege of the white alone" (1967: 30). This does not strike me at all as being the substance of the book's racial attitude. But it may be the substance of Crane's consciously intended racial message, as far as there is one. Henry is a black hero, and he does perform a heroic action. M. Solomon notes that in the nineties the production of white writers which had championed black characters in one way or another in their early works (G.W. Cable, Mark Twain, William Dean Howells) did not respond adequately to a wave of lynchings of blacks unprecedented since the war, and that after Henry Johnson there are no more heroic blacks in white literature for some decades (1956b: 40). Gross (1975: 108) notes that there are no black protagonists for quite a few years. M. Solomon praises Crane's adequate handling of Johnson's heroism, showing his fear and his confused psychological reactions: "This is no knight-on-horseback portrayal" (1956b: 41). Vasil'evskaia (1967: 215) also points out that Henry is not idealized by Crane in a way that would isolate him from the black community as a whole. This is so much the case that other critics will be able to speak of Henry's "pathetic limitations" (Nagel 1980: 62). The story needs something more solid to hold on to. The fact that Henry becomes a hero is more than tempered by the fact that he also becomes an idiot and is safely out of the way; Henry Johnson may become a hero but not a hero of tragedy: that is a role for Trescott.

According to Cooley, the narrative point of view abandons Henry in the later part of the novel, indeed from the moment of his accident: "From this point on, even Crane begins referring to Henry as "it," as 'a thing' " (1975: 12). This is for him a defect of the story, the main defect. Crane develops his idea of brotherhood between white and black at the expense of the development and handling of black character (1975: 13). In the second part of the story, Crane abandons Henry and focuses on Trescott: Henry is an "invisible man" for his townsfolks, Cooley argues, but also for the reader, who cannot match with the actual Henry the image he receives from the distorted vision of the town, and he wonders whether this is a kind of trap for the reader, making him choose betwen two visions (1975: 13). The story requires that we side with Trescott and forget about Henry: Cooley would like to have the real Henry restored for the reader to identify with him. There is some truth in this, but it also sounds like the frustration of a reader who has had his happy ending snatched away from him. After all, Cooley does not consider the possibility of the reader's being unable

identify with Henry if he were presented to him: he believes that in fact Henry sane. What we do see of Henry after his accident is not especially attractive. nd to dispute Crane's right to destroy Henry as a potentially lovable character to ask him to write a different story altogether. The point of this story requires at Henry Johnson should be both a black, a hero and a pathetic, mindless onster. What does this combination bring about?

Henry's crude leap from comic stereotype to hero happens to be an teresting experiment in genre, but not an entirely deliberate one on Crane's rt. Crane's racial consciousness may be even more limited than Cooley is illing to admit, but his un-consciousness, his intuitive poetic ability, goes far yond these limits. Because the juxtaposition does produce something new. here is a suggestion in Katz that the stereotype is broken by Crane: Henry is esented as a comic figure but then breaks this image through his conscious roism (1969: xix). But the stereotype breaks twice: first, as Henry becomes hero, second, as he becomes a monster. Gibson's reading (1968: 38) seems to e to relate in an adequate way the breaking of the stereotype and Henry's formation: the townspeople fear Henry because they feel he is free from the gid system of manners which he established before through his complying in e social comedy. This is especially clear in the contrast between the two arragut scenes. If we accept this reading, it would seem that to present a mpliant and Uncle Tom-like Henry Johnson before his accident is almost a ructural requirement[21]. Crane's story can then be read as a powerful decons- uction of the white man's representation of black men in a post-slave society. ut if we had to relinquish what we recognize as the authorial intention in order achieve this reading its force would immediately be weakened in an obvious ay.

The only limit for this reading is the fact that elsewhere Crane used the ereotyped image of the black man without destroying it. In fact, in what I take be Crane's intentions, Henry's blackness and his deformation are related only cidentally; nothing is more accidental than Johnson's being burned by acid in e midst of a fire. But in what I take to be his unconscious motivations, Henry's ackness and his facelessness are divergent aspects of the same, rather than the oduct of an accidental convergence. Henry is a monster because he is a black an. This fact underlies the story and is only indicated in a paradoxical way. The tizens of Whilomville do not identify the element of racism in their fear of enry. But nor does Crane see it in his own fascination with the subject. In riting "The Monster" Crane wrote both his sympathy to blacks and his racist

ge this story as what it is historically : a monster in its peculiar mixture of blindness and insight. Crane was the product of his age and class in his superficial racial attitudes; but as an artist he created a work that delves far beneath that surface to the hard truths it concealed, and destroys itself in the process.

NOTES

1. It is evident that in spite of the popularity of anti-intentionalist theories since the fifties, the practical intepretation of texts has always relied heavily on the concept of authorial intention. Most critical writings show that the recognition of authorial intention is widely held to be relevant to the understanding of the text. Of course I am referring to the authorial intention assumed by the reader on the basis of the work and any other material available, not to the noumenon in the author's mind. This assumed authorial intention is not necessarily the same as the (present-day) meaning of the text, although many readers either do not distinguish between the two or prefer to think of them as perfectly coterminous.

2. In this case, however, the work had already been accepted for publication by the editors.

3. Beer (1941:329). Kahn notes the deepest irony of the whole thing: "Like Henry Johnson, the story had suffered rejection because of its surface horror" (1963: 45). And with much the same reasons being advanced: potential damage to women and children.

4. *Harper's Magazine* XCVII (August 1898) 343-376. Harper and Brothers reissued the story in book form the following year (together with "The Blue Hotel" and "His New Mittens") under the title *The Monster and Other Stories*. All page references are to this edition (abbreviated TM).

5. Several critics have assumed that it was: Follett (1926: ix), Åhnebrink (1950: 381), M. Solomon (1956b: 38), Vasil'evskaia (1967: 219), Cooley (1975: 14). This idea derives from a "seminal" comment of Beer's (1923: 329). However, Cora Crane herself commented that Henry Johnson "was a hero only as he was a horror" (Academy [March 2, 1901]; cited in R. W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane : A Biography* [New York : Braziller] 334-335).

6. Hawthorne (1900: 260); cf. Gross (1975: 109); Morace (1981: 65).

7. Hoffman (1957: 5), E. Solomon (1966: 30), Gibson (1968: 136), cf. Cady (1980: 157).

. Cf. Åhnebrink (1950: 378 ss), M. Solomon (1956b: 38 f.) Hafley (1959), Ellison (1960), Kahn(1963), G.W. Johnson (1963: 74), E. Solomon (1966), Bassan (1967: 7), Vasil'evskaia (1967: 217), Gibson (1968: 138), Katz (1969: xix), Gross (1975: 103 f.),

as a reaction against the "American neighbourhood" fiction (1966: 172 f.). There are also remarks on point of view and narrative voice, studies of various kinds of allusion, allegorical interpretations... and a revaluation of the question of race in the story.

10. *Rebels and Ancestors*, quoted in M. Solomon (1956b: 41).

11. "The Kings's Favour" and the lost "Vashti in the Dark."

12. M. Solomon (1956b: 42) rejects Berryman's sole reference, and what he describes as his general attempt (and Geismar's) to turn Crane into "a reviler of Negroes" using a Freudian "pseudo-science." Berryman suggests that Reifsnyder sympathizes with Johnson because he is a barber and uses a razor, and Crane unconsciously associates blacks with knives and stabbing. There is a suggestion in M. Solomon that Reifsnyder sympathizes with Henry because he is a foreigner (and thus a marginal character too).

13. I think that these critics are too generous with Crane in their interpretations of both passages, and fail to see that both rest on gross racial (even racist) stereotypes.

14. Cooley also dismisses the figure of Alek Williams as an inexcusable and unnecessary cliché (1975: 13).

15. Vasil'evskaia (1967: 214, 218); my translation.

16. Both Vasil'evskaia and Gibson assume that this is the product of Crane's authorial intention; I would not go that far myself. But, by the way, why cover Henry with a black veil (TM 83)? On one hand, it is an allusion to Hawthorne's story, The Minister's Black Veil (there is a suggestion of this in Katz [1969: xix]); on the other, it is a way of marking Henry: he has got no face, but he is still a black; in fact, he has become the quintessential blackness for the imagination of white Whilomville.

17. F. i. in "Stephen Crane in Minetta Lane" or "Seen at Hot Spring" (Gross 1975: 115).

18. But the Pullman car porter as a Negro dude is just another comic stereotype; cf. its use in Crane's story "The Knife" (in Crane 1963: 694), or its deflation in Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*.

19. Crane was not in the least above the use of facile ethnic generalizations. In another instance he makes a sweeping characterization of the Mediterraneans as "liars and men of delay" (cf. Gross 1975: 132-33). By the way, "Watermelon Alley" is still another folk stereotype Crane is using without challenging it. Cf. the blacks in "The Knife," who have an irrational passion for the watermelons in their neighbours' gardens.

20. See his story "The Ideal and the Real" (in Linder 1978).

21. Wolford (1983: 92) also seems to read the story in this way. The faceless Henry becomes a symbol of man stripped of civilized rationality, and the community can't allow such a reminder to walk its streets (1983: 93). Twenty years earlier, G.W. Johnson had already noted Henry Johnson's role as "the reference by which we see both the necessity and the duplicity of decorum" (1963: 74): he is accepted in the "dandy" scene, as a parody of white decorum, and when he is rejected later, the social decorum is revealed "not only as the restraint on blackness but as its agent" (1963: 74).

This and other related papers were prepared during a leave from the University of Zaragoza, and I am indebted for financial assistance to the USA-Spanish Joint Committee for Cultural and Educational Cooperation. I want to thank both institutions for their support.

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